

Rising number of postgraduates 'could become barrier to social mobility'

The ever increasing number of people holding postgraduate degrees, with numbers almost tripling in little over 15 years, risks becoming yet another barrier to social mobility for poorer students wary of taking on an even bigger debt burden, a leading education charity has warned.

While good careers were formerly open to those with only A-levels, the bulk were currently only accessible if you had a degree, the Sutton Trust said, something which might soon become the case for postgraduate qualifications.

Research for the trust by the London School of Economics and Surrey University shows that while in 1996 just 4% of working Britons aged 26 to 60 had a postgraduate qualification, this was 11%, or 2.1 million people in 2013.

The study found those with a higher degree earned around £5,500 a year more on average, equating to a career-long "postgraduate premium" of around £200,000.

While this was considerably more than the cost of taking a postgraduate course, the risk was students from poorer backgrounds would balk at taking on yet more loans having paid up to £9,000 a year already for their undergraduate courses. Further degrees can easily cost £20,000 a year in tuition and living expenses, the trust said.

The research into wider changes in qualifications is equally striking: in 1981 58% of the post-26 workforce had no qualifications at all, while 5% had a degree, figures which had changed by 2011 to 5% 31% respectively. theguardian.com 2013

Table 1a: Employment Shares by Education, Great Britain

A. All	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001	2006	2011
No Qualifications	0.58	0.47	0.33	0.16	0.11	0.08	0.05
Intermediate 1	0.23	0.29	0.43	0.53	0.55	0.53	0.52
Intermediate 2	0.14	0.16	0.15	0.17	0.16	0.15	0.12
Undergraduate Degree or Higher	0.05	0.07	0.09	0.14	0.18	0.23	0.31
Of which:							
Undergraduate Degree Only	-	-	-	0.10	0.12	0.15	0.20
Postgraduate Degree	-	-	-	0.04	0.06	0.08	0.11
Sample Size	96384	69861	69998	172024	163714	148705	121246

Table 2a: Employment Shares of Postgraduates, Great Britain

A. All	1996	2001	2006	2011
Masters	0.45	0.49	0.51	0.52
PGCE	0.21	0.21	0.23	0.23
Doctorate	0.19	0.16	0.14	0.13
Other Postgraduate	0.15	0.13	0.12	0.12
Sample Size	6898	8980	11928	11778

Notes: Source is Labour Force Surveys (annual for 1981, 1986 and 1991, quarterly thereafter) for people in Great Britain. Employment shares are defined for people in work aged 26 to 60. Intermediate 1 qualifications include school-level qualification up to A levels (or an equivalent level diploma via further education), whilst intermediate 2 include professional undergraduate level qualifications which are not a degree (like teaching and nursing qualifications).

<https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Postgraduate-Premium-Report-1.pdf>